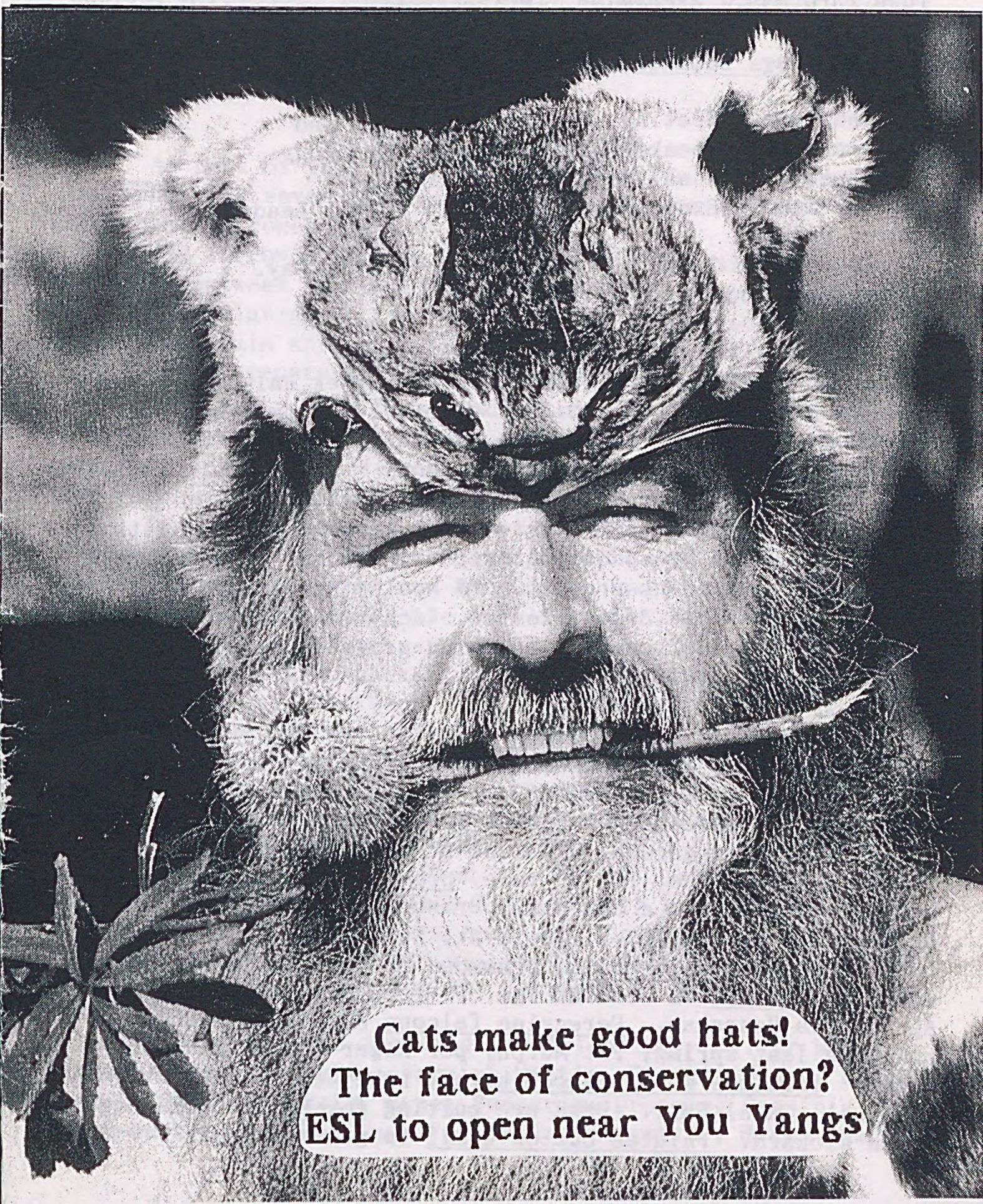


Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat *Inc*

May 2000



**Cats make good hats!
The face of conservation?
ESL to open near You Yangs**

DIARY DATES

Fri 5th May. Meeting. Swans of Lake Wendouree (and other areas). Speaker Ken Kraaijeveld, PhD student, Zoology Department, Melbourne University.

Sun 7th May. Excursion. Lexton Area. Leader Eileen Anderson. Club member.

Tues 23rd May. Excursion. Mt Beckworth - see the correas in flower etc. Leader Helen Burgess.

May 23rd May Committee Meeting. Carol's, , 7-30pm.

Fri 2nd June. Meeting. Mycology - fungi and fungimapping. Speaker Martine Paull, Mycology Department, National Herbarium, Melbourne.

Sun 4th June. Excursion. Rivers of Gold. Leader Claire Dalman.

Fri 16th - Sun 18th. Club camp-out, Apollo Bay. Leader John Mildren..

APRIL MEETING POINTS

*1. Heritage Festival's Yarrowee Creek Walk attracted 7 members of the general public. *2 Bendigo flower show in October. *3 We were invited to participate in the Winter Festival and the Olympic Torch ceremony - but we felt that they were not related to our interests. *4 Invitation to Maryborough FNC talk on "Box Ironbark Invertebrates", 14th April. *5 Ocean Grove Campout report. *6 Ern Perkins spoke about the Photo-point project. *7 Apollo Bay campout \$10/head/night. *8 Supper Roster, lack of names, so please volunteer! *9 2002 campout planning progressing, please think about speakers etc.

FIELD REPORTS

Red browed finches back at Mt Helen, 1st week of April, Avis Barlow. Insect wings in a regurgitated currawong pellet, what were the insects? Ballarat North, Helen Burgess. Pair of grey fantails in garden, Pleasant street, 5th April, Greg Binns. A long line, 100 or more, processional caterpillars attempting to cross a car park, Brisbane, 26th March, Dulcie Brooke. Little eagle, Victoria St, 3rd April, Ken Hammond. Lots of eastern spinebills, Drummond St Sth, 6th April, Tony Johns. Barn owl on road at 8pm, Ti-Tree Rd, Dunnstown, 3rd April, Les Hanrahan. Peregrine falcons nested on a Sturt St building last spring, Pat Murphy per Roger Thomas / Nature Notes. Immature white-faced heron, Lake Wendouree, 1st week of April, Carol Hall. DNRE are baiting foxes, Mt Buninyong, Brian Rickard. Painted button-quail in garden for 2

days, probably escapee, Wendouree, John Gregurke. One azure kingfisher, swan with 3 cygnets, all downy, week or two old, dead platypus, snagged in fishing line (opposite Deuchers Canoe Camp), two emus that had been climbing cliff, slipped and fell upside down in river 3m from startled canoeists, Glenelg River, 13th March, Kevin Andrews. Golden orb-weaver spider, *Nephila edulis*, Grenville, 2nd April, Brian Andrews. Yew, specimen complete with berry brought in by Claire Dalman. Aboriginal stone chippings and North American Indian stone arrowhead, brought in by Lyndsay Fink.

ALONG THE YARROWEE

As part of this years Heritage Festival ten members of the FNCB took seven members of the public for a nature stroll along the Yarrowee Creek.

The Yarrowee from Ballarat to Cambrian Hill marks the boundary between the Ordovician sedimentary rocks to the east and basalt plateau to the west. It was once described as "a limpid mountain stream rushing down from the hills amidst rocks and ferns, creepers and mosses", The 1850's gold rush changed the environment. Mud from cradles would have made the clear water yellow with clay. Brick footings and foundations of the Band and Albion No 7 Mine can be seen at the southern end of the Yarrowee River Flora and Fauna reserve in Redan.

For many years the river was used as a sewer for waste from the hospital, soapworks and fellmongery, meatworks, woollen mills, gasworks and many other industries. The Chinese market garden, south of the woollen mills, grew vegetables into the 1950's. The river is now littered with shopping trolleys and plastic packaging. Weeds remain a problem. Dense growth of gorse, blackberry, fennel, hemlock and teasel choke out indigenous flora.

"Yarrowee" is thought to be from the early use of the Scottish "Yarrow", a diminutive to suit the smaller stream.

Yarrowee Flora and Fauna Reserve was planted in the early 1980's by the Australian Plant Society. The Yarrowee River Corridor Landscape Master Plan of 1995 outlined strategies for future development. Yuille's Station Park has been established and the adjacent wetland has been developed since then. The bird hide, indigenous planting, paths and picnic facilities are part of long term plans for the Yarrowee from the Gong Gong Reservoir to Napoleons.

Plants observed included the following:- Silver Wattle, Lightwood, Black Wattle, Varnish Wattle, Prickly Moses, Black Sheoak, Silver Banksia, Sweet Bursaria, Drooping Cassinia, Scent-bark, River Red Gum, Yellow Gum, Messmate, Swamp Gum,

Manna gum, Common Phragmites, Kangaroo Apple, Cumbungi and mats of liverwort along the creek bank. Puff-ball fungi were emerging from the ground, one was already disgorging its spores. Birds seen included:- Black Duck, Blackbird, Black-fronted Dotterel, Brown Thornbill, Dusky Moorhen, Eastern Spinebill, Grey Butcher Bird, Grey Fantail, Little Raven, Magpie, Magpie Lark, Masked Lapwing, New Holland Honeyeater, Red-browed Finch, Sparrow, Starling, Swamp Hen and White-faced Heron. Kevin found a fox den just above the water level - cool, but liable soon to be flooded! Common grass-blue butterflies flitted through the grassy glades and Australian Admirals floated through the trees, virtually disappearing when they alighted on leaf litter and closed their wings. Leaf-curling spiders were waiting patiently in their rolled up leaves for prey to get tangled in their webs. We checked the rocks for treasures and found chalcopyrites and fool's gold.

The Yarrowee is by no means perfect but it certainly has improved from what it was - thanks to the hard work of many people over the last twenty years!

Based on John Gregurke's handout, with additions from BDA

HUNT ON FOR NATIVE GRASSES



Take a good look at the grass in your backyard - it could be an endangered species. Country Victorians are being asked to check farms, roadsides and back yards for native grassland in need of protection. About 95% of Victoria's grasslands have been cleared or altered in the past 200 years, according to the

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World Wide Fund for Nature.

South-east Australia program manager Philippa Walsh said ecosystems were being threatened. Ms Walsh said species including the earless dragon and bearded dragon and flowers such as donkey orchid, duck orchid and chocolate lilies depended on the grasses.

WWF is managing a Federal Government funded grants program to protect Victoria's grasslands.....

From Herald Sun, Fri 10th Dec 1999

Submitted by Bob Curtain

TASMANIAN TREK

Oh I love to go a wandering,
along a mountain track,

.....and so it seems does Ern Perkins and his friends from Castlemaine FNC. Ern was our guest speaker at the April meeting. A group from CFNC walked the Overland Track of Cradle Mountain - Lake St Clair National Park from Walheim Chalet to Lake St Clair. They did the walk in mid March, 1999 - the best time of the year weather-wise.

We were shown slides of button grass, which covers much of the area and is really a sedge. Also we were shown scrambling coral fern. Easy walking around picturesque Cradle Lake revealed pencil pines and the Tasmanian snow gums *E. coccifera* and *E. subcrenulata*. Craggy Cradle Mountain loomed up ahead and there was a steep climb to Marion's Look-out, but the fantastic views made it worthwhile, and that was the worst of the climbing over and done with.

Barn Bluff, a volcanic plug, then became the dominant landscape feature for quite a while. The peaty ground in this area makes the creek water a brown colour, the guide owned up to making a billy of tea for some previous walkers and forgetting to put the tea in - but nobody noticed the difference! Large numbers of snow gums had been killed in this area, it looked as if they had been killed by fire but the guide assured the group that they had been killed by frost. Ern showed a slide of mountain rocket, with its red heads.

The first nights stop was at Mt Emmet. The group stayed at commercially operated huts, the huts looked quite luxurious compared to my memories of the public huts, and the public huts are quite luxurious compared to sleeping on the wet ground with leeches looping their way round the inside of your tent! The huts were stocked with food once a year, the food being brought in by helicopter. Fresh food was carried in by the guide that accompanied the walkers. Such comparative luxury means that many people can do the walk who maybe wouldn't be able or

willing to do it any other way. Needless to say it all comes at a price, someone asked how much and Ern itemized the costs but I stopped adding them up when I got to \$1400. The same company proposed similar huts at Wilson's Promontory and understandably received widespread protests about commercialization in National Parks. However in fairness to the operators it must be said that the huts were not visible from the track and appeared "bio-friendly". Ern didn't show any animal pictures; presumably the hut operators, in line with current wildlife policy, did not feed animals at all. However I must admit I have fond memories of "pet" Bennett's wallabies at most camp-sites, juvenile spotted-tail quolls frolicking outside the window at Windermere Hut and rogue possums that would rip open your pack and help themselves if you didn't feed them.

Moving on we saw celery top pine and *Persoonia gunnii*, one of the few plants in flower - a disadvantage of going in autumn. Through Frog Flats and then myrtle beech forest, the tree trunks covered in thick moss. A leatherwood tree, famous for its honey and then there was snow falling on the mountains, and the third snow gum species, *E. pauciflora* - which we have in Victoria.

Finally the group made it to Narcissus Bay and did the journey to the southern end of Lake St Clair by boat.

A member asked what birds were observed and Ern reeled off the list which included ground parrot and the indigenous Tasmanian species :- yellow throated honeyeater, black currawong, green rosella, Tasmanian native hen, yellow wattle bird, Tasmanian thornbill and scrubtit.

Finally we all thanked Ern for an interesting talk and enjoyable evening.

Brian Andrews

EXCURSION TO BALLARAT BOTANICAL GARDENS

About twenty four members congregated outside the Robert Clark and the Conservatory, to be initially addressed by Jenny Vernon and Carole Haines of the "Friends of the Botanical Gardens Association", about the origins of the gardens. Two years after the municipality of Ballarat was proclaimed in 1856 a decision was made to convert the Ballarat Police Horse Paddock into a botanical garden. A competition for a design for the gardens was conducted and one George Longley, trained in horticulture, from Nottingham in England was appointed by the Committee of Management to bring the winning design to fruition. Plants and seeds were obtained from the Melbourne and Geelong Botanical Gardens and the principal tree plantings

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that still characterize the gardens today were set by George Longley in the 1860's. None of the original native vegetation exists now. Today majestic specimens of oaks, elms, maples, redwoods, cedars, pines, spruce, horse chestnuts, planes, poplars, magnolias and ash are testament to George Longley's vision.

Subsequently our group divided into two lots led by Jenny and Carole and we each meandered through the surroundings, gleaning from our respective leaders interesting facts and tit-bits of information about developments in the gardens since George Longley's programme of propagation was undertaken. If I may relate from my own reading of "Green Mountains" by Bernard O'Reilly, the Prime Ministers Avenue contains a bust of one Earl Christmas Grafton Page whose son was killed by lightning - not very pleasant, or was it a case of the Lord's wrath upon him?

The tallest tree in the gardens is a Western Yellow Pine, *Pinus ponderosa* of west and north USA at 41m. However the gardens have examples of the world's tallest living trees - the coastal redwood *Sequoia sempervirens*. In their native central California and south west Oregon, these trees often exceed 90m; the world's tallest being 112m in Redwood National Park, in the north west corner of California. These trees may take 400-500 years to reach maturity; some trees are known to be more than 1500 years old; so our specimens may still be in relative adolescence! Also in our gardens, examples of Sierra Redwood a.k.a. Big Tree, *Wellingtonia Sequoiadendron giganteum* a distinct species, both redwoods within the family TAXODIACEAE - cypress. The Big Tree is the largest of all trees in BULK. The General Sherman tree in Sequoia National Park is the largest specimen, 31m in circumference at its base and 83m tall. Total estimated weight 6167 tons (c.f. the battleship Bismarck 52,600 tons).

There are colourful beds of annuals adjacent to pathways eg Non Stop Begonias, Salvia, Impatiens etc. Surrounding Adam Lindsay Gordon's cottage is a cool shady, living fern grotto including Small-leafed Azara, *Azara microphylla* from Argentina and Chile, the red berries of Puriri from New Zealand, *Vitex lucens* and red fruit clusters of Hawthorn bush, *Cretaeus* sp as backdrop. Greg Binns pointed out a grey fantail. Brian Andrews found five mushrooms and half a yellow stainer - which resembles a mushroom but can make people violently ill if ingested. On way to North Gardens for lunch - white ibis, great crested grebe, little raven (ravens have brown downy feathers under wings; crows have white downy feathers under wings), mosquito fish, *Gambusia affinis*, introduced and a pest.

Kevin Andrews observed a blue-billed duck and one young. We inspected North Gardens Catchment Management Masterplan, also observed brown goshawk and a red wattle bird's nest in acacia shrub at lunch site.

In the afternoon we adjourned to Winter Swamp (on western outskirts of Ballarat), bone dry but still interesting observations eg old ibis nests, left handed snail shells, *Physidae* family, brown falcon spotted by Greg Binns, kookaburra, magpie, superb fairy wren, brown thornbill, striated pardalote, immature scarlet robin, willie wagtail, female rufous whistler, black-shouldered kites spotted by Les Hanrahan and a hare spotted by Jack Netherway.

Tony Johns

SKYDANCERS

The hot summer has provided a bonanza in butterflies at Skydancers Butterfly Gardens. On a recent visit to Castlemaine, it was pleasing to see how the plants have developed since our club excursion, and the number of butterflies on the wing. There were large numbers, especially of Blue Triangles, Common Eggfly, Wanderer, Chequered Swallowtail, Common Grass Yellow and the big bright Orchard butterflies.

Gary Sobey said that they had bred so well this summer that he has been able to release 45 females into suitable bush locations and a number of other species into the garden outside the enclosure, where he hopes that the butterfly-friendly plants will sustain them.

Margaret Rotheram

APRIL POSER. Roger said that he was not happy with any explanation that he had been given. No club member has given me an explanation. I have got an explanation that needs more work on it, I will print my explanation next month.

MAY POSER. Has anyone got a club newsletter for May 1975 or February 1976?

Brian Andrews

-----***----- FNCB -----***-----

Meetings are held at the Ballarat Horticulture centre, corner of Gregory and Gillies Streets, ie. the NW corner of the Botanic Gardens, VICROADS 254 F8, commencing at 7-30pm

Excursions depart from Creswick Plaza, VICROADS 255 M10, at 9-30 am, unless specified otherwise.

Committee: Claire Dalman (President).. , Greg Binns (Vice President).. , John Gregurke (Secretary).. , Bob Curtain , Brian Andrews (Editor).. , Helen Burgess, Maureen Christie, Lyndsay Fink, Carol Hall, John Mildren, Pat Murphy.

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